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RESULTS OF COMMISSION GOVERNMENT IN EMPORIA, KANSAS

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Emporia is a small city of about 10,000 people, the census report gives 9,058. It adopted the commission form of government on February 18, 1910, by a vote of 1,159 in favor to 214 opposed. The election was called by a petition bearing the signatures of forty per cent of the qualified voters, filed with the mayor and council who were then compelled by statute to provide for the election. Let us answer the questions most frequently asked.

Does the commission form of government pay? The old salary of a mayor or of a councilman could not exceed one dollar a year, and it was never turned over. Now the mayor receives one thousand dollars, and each of the two commissioners nine hundred dollars a year. But about four thousand dollars of water rents are collected annually, which remained unpaid under the old system. Likewise about two thousand five hundred dollars of what would have been cancelled as uncollectible in light fees were, up to the leasing of the electric light plant in April, 1911, rigidly collected. Seventy-eight insurance companies do business in Emporia, and the license tax is twenty dollars a year for a life, fifteen dollars for a fire, and ten dollars for an accident insurance company. One-third of these companies paid in 1909; all of them paid in 1910. In 1909 there were 279 dog taxes collected, in 1910, 400. The income from the billiard hall licenses doubled during the year, although there was no increase in the number of tables. The two per cent interest on daily balances deposited with the city treasurer had never been collected until the commission began to operate. The income from that source alone is now enough to pay the salary of one of the commissioners. It is to be understood that all of these taxes were due under the old system, but they were not collected; the chief reason being that the council met only once in two weeks, and, if someone suggested that the collections be enforced, he would be informed by another worthy member of the council that the

delinquent one was an honest and upright citizen, prompt in ordinary business dealings, and, if given a little time, would undoubtedly pay voluntarily. So the matter was referred to the proper committee again and never heard of afterward.

Is responsibility definitely located? Every commissioner is elected by the whole city and he feels himself responsible not merely to the neighbors in his ward, but to the entire city. Moreover, each commissioner has a definite set of duties the responsibility for which he cannot shift to anyone. The mayor is the commissioner of police, fire and health departments, and is responsible for all ordinances and police regulations; he has charge of all public parks and all city property; he enforces all rules and regulations necessary to keep streets, alleys, and public grounds in a sanitary condition. The commissioner of finance and revenue prepares the annual budget, collects all revenues of the city and manages the finances. The commissioner of streets and public utilities has charge of the water-works, light plant, power, heating or gas plants, street railway, telephone, or other public utility owned by the city. He has supervision of the construction and maintenance of boulevards, public parks, driveways, sidewalks, bridges, sewers.

Is the gap between the officers and the public bridged? Between eight and five o'clock daily there is always to be found one commissioner to attend to the people's wants and complaints. The commission holds a legislative session once a week, and, instead of committing and recommitting, they do business, each one knowing that he is responsible for a definite field and the others recognize that his reasonable requests should be granted.

Are better men brought into office? No governmental machinery can do that; it can only furnish the easiest means for the popular will and public opinion to assert themselves. And the commission form is at least the latest step in that direction.

Is the ballot shortened? There can be only one city officer chosen each year, for only one of the three goes out annually. The one chosen at the last election was the mayor. Two candidates appeared, but there was nothing to indicate whether they belonged to the same political party or not. In fact, no one was heard to raise the question. In the last election under the old system, the different political parties put forth candidates for mayor, police judge, city treasurer, treasurer of the board of education, and councilmen. That

may not be a confusing number to a well-informed voter in a city of 10,000; and yet, electing one commissioner a year and increasing the appointive power of the commission and holding it responsible has had the effect of increasing efficiency.

Does the commission form increase popular interest in elections?

Since the population during the last ten years has remained stable, the number of votes cast in the two elections previous and in the two elections since the change will be an answer. In 1908 the total vote cast for all mayoralty candidates was 1,799; in 1909 it was 1,763. In 1910, the first under the new plan, the total vote was 2,473 and in 1911, 2,695. Some allowance should probably be made for the interest in the street car franchise, which came before the voters in 1911, and yet the total vote for and against the franchise was 100 less than the total cast for the mayoralty candidates.